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1.0 Introduction to ODOT’s Planning Program Involvement Process

Negotiating through Ohio’s construction zones with all the orange barrels and construction crews can often be challenging. These transportation improvement projects, however, are the drivers that help to improve accessibility and mobility, economic growth, and quality of life for Ohioans.

The planning process to identify and finance needed transportation projects begins years in advance of the construction you see. Gathering public input is a critical step in this process, providing the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) the means to plan and finance projects that will have the greatest benefit for local, regional, and statewide communities. Public involvement helps provide interested parties an opportunity to have a voice in how the transportation system is developed. The following document describes ODOT’s Statewide Planning products and processes, and explains how you can participate in shaping the state’s transportation future.

1.1 Public Involvement Guiding Principles

ODOT actively solicits public input and comment in the development of Ohio’s transportation plans and programs. ODOT’s public involvement guiding principles are as follows:

- Provide early and continuous public involvement opportunities;
- Provide reasonable public access to technical data and policy information;
- Provide adequate notice of public involvement opportunities and time for public review and comment at key transportation planning development milestones;
- Conduct public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- Employ visualization techniques to describe the planning process inputs and outcomes;
- To the maximum extent practicable, make public information available in electronically accessible format;
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received;
- Seek out and consider the needs and input of traditionally underserved populations, including low-income and minority households;
- Provide information for/to populations with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), as needed;
- Enhance decision-making by integrating diverse interests and desires that identify community values and support transportation needs.
1.2 Ohio’s Statewide Transportation Planning Products

Access Ohio is the state’s long-range transportation plan, which is periodically updated by ODOT. The plan is developed to guide, inform, and support Ohio’s transportation policies, programs, and investments, looking at least 20 years into the future. The plan includes a comprehensive inventory and analysis of existing and projected future conditions on Ohio’s multimodal transportation networks. It also considers the financial, social, environmental, and economic factors and trends that both affect transportation conditions and to which the transportation system must respond.

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is the official listing of transportation improvement projects that will be financed throughout the state over a four year period. STIP projects are selected in a manner consistent with the investment strategies defined in Access Ohio 2045. Transportation projects must be listed in the STIP to be eligible for federal funding. Projects are selected for inclusion in the STIP by ODOT and Ohio’s 17 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), in consultation with county engineers, Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), local government project sponsors, and other public and private transportation stakeholders.

A component of Ohio’s statewide transportation process is using studies to address various transportation modes, corridors, or regions. These studies supplement Access Ohio by focusing on specific transportation issues or geographic areas. Planning studies of this nature allow ODOT to conduct more detailed analysis and make more informed recommendations for meeting transportation needs. Examples of recent modal or regional planning studies include a statewide freight study and plan, a statewide bicycle and pedestrian plan, and a US 33 corridor study.
2.0 Public Involvement Processes

2.1 Statewide Transportation Plan

ODOT updates the Statewide Transportation Plan - Access Ohio - on a five to seven year cycle. ODOT uses the following processes to obtain public input in the plan’s development and approval:

1. Establish Steering Committee
ODOT establishes a steering committee comprised of Ohio transportation stakeholders to help guide the plan development process. Stakeholders include: local government representatives, modal transportation system operators, environmental resource agencies, social service providers, MPO/RTPO representatives, and ODOT employees. The steering committee is convened at key plan development decision points/milestones to review plan update progress, related documentation, and next steps.

2. Conduct Customer Preference Survey
ODOT initiates each Access Ohio update by conducting a statistically valid statewide survey of Ohioans to gauge and understand how the public views Ohio's transportation system and what issues the public believes should be addressed. The survey results are incorporated into the plan development process.

3. Maintain interactive Access Ohio website
ODOT maintains a plan website, access.ohio.gov, which is updated with new developments and participation opportunities. The website will include electronic copies of all technical documents, data bases, publications, and mapping produced throughout the plan update process. The site will also include an email address for public comments on the plan development and approval processes.

4. Social Media Presence
ODOT maintains an active Facebook page, Twitter account and Youtube channel to update the general public about public participation opportunities and plan updates.

5. Publish SPR Newsletters
A newsletter about general planning topics is published quarterly and contains occasional updates about Access Ohio.

6. Interactive Online Forum / Public Involvement Meetings
ODOT will engage the public throughout the process and some potential ways this is accomplished are through interactive online platforms and/or public meetings.

7. Formal Public Comment Period
ODOT notifies stakeholders of its formal 45 day public comment period via an email blast and the plan website, access.ohio.gov.
8. Comment Responses
ODOT provides written response to each comment submitted during the formal 45 day public comment period. ODOT responses discuss how the comment was considered in finalizing the plan update.

2.2 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)
Ohio’s STIP is updated on a biennial schedule. MPOs lead the development and public review of TIPs for their regions and ODOT coordinates the development and public review of the STIP for Ohio’s non-metropolitan regions in coordination with the RTPOs. A map of the MPO and RTPO geographies can be found in Figure 3.1.

**ODOT’s public involvement process for the STIP is as follows:**

1. Maintain STIP Website
   ODOT maintains a STIP website containing all of the STIP processes, documents, and updates: [transportation.ohio.gov/STIP](http://transportation.ohio.gov/STIP). Contact information is clearly identified for the public to request information or provide comments.

2. Rural Consultation Meetings
   ODOT and RTPOs host rural consultation meetings at the beginning of every STIP development period. The meetings provide a forum to meet with local officials to collaborate on currently programmed projects and discuss regional transportation concerns and needs. Various meetings are held during a six-week period at centralized locations across the state. Invites are sent to local stakeholders via email, letters, flyers, media releases, and newsletters. The rural consultation process and meeting schedules may be found on the ODOT RTPO website: [transportation.ohio.gov/RTPO](http://transportation.ohio.gov/RTPO).

3. Formal Public Involvement Period
   During the spring of the STIP development period, ODOT holds a two-week public review and comment period. ODOT Districts, in coordination with MPOs and RTPOs, provide a forum for the public to review and comment on the transportation projects that are planned for some phase of implementation over the next four years. ODOT notifies the public of the comment period by various methods including media releases, newspaper legal notices, articles in newsletters, and various social media forums. Comments may be provided on the draft STIP by visiting the STIP website, by attending one of the scheduled public meetings, or by visiting an ODOT District, MPO, or RTPO office during the public involvement period. ODOT reviews and provides timely written responses to all written comments received during the public involvement period. If significant changes to the draft STIP are deemed necessary, ODOT will extend the public involvement period for an additional two weeks. Comments and responses regarding the draft STIP are summarized and included as an appendix in the final STIP.
4. Final STIP & Revisions
Upon US DOT approval, the final approved STIP is made available online at the STIP website and the public is notified of its publication. The STIP is scheduled to be amended on a quarterly basis as needed. ODOT relies on Ohio’s MPOs and RTPOs to utilize their established public involvement processes for regionally significant projects within their regions that require amendments. For regionally significant projects outside of the MPO or RTPO regions that require amendments, ODOT will post the draft amendment on the STIP website for public review and comment. All approved STIP amendments are viewable on the STIP website.

3.0 MPO and RTPO Collaboration

ODOT relies on Ohio’s Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) to assist in the public involvement process within their respective cities and communities. Each MPO and RTPO possesses unique processes for soliciting public involvement on ODOT plan updates, ranging from public meetings and surveys to citizen committees.

RTPOs serve as an important channel for rural communities to become involved in the statewide planning process. ODOT has a separate rural consultation process, whereby opportunities are provided for local elected officials, in non-metropolitan areas, to participate in the statewide planning process with regard to the needs of each official’s region of the state. Those officials also review and provide comments on ODOT’s planning products like the statewide longrange transportation plan (Access Ohio) and the STIP. The Rural Consultation Process Manual can be accessed at transportation.ohio.gov/RTPO.
4.0 Updating the Public Involvement Plan

ODOT provides an opportunity to review the public involvement plan at least once every five years. Updates will be made as necessary. Reviewing public involvement opportunities is becoming particularly important as the technological options for public involvement are rapidly evolving.

As better technology becomes available, ODOT intends to review the public involvement plan to decide what additional engagement opportunities will be added. Each time the public involvement plan is updated, a minimum 45 day public review period will occur.

5.0 ODOT’s Public Involvement Process for Projects

Once a project is selected for implementation, it is developed through ODOT’s Project Development Process (PDP). The PDP defines the procedures and processes to advance a project through the required environmental, right-of-way, and design/engineering phases. The PDP includes public involvement processes that are separate and distinct from the Statewide Transportation Planning Public Involvement Process described in this document. Information on the PDP can be found at transportation.ohio.gov/projects/pdp/.
6.0 Resources

ODOT’s Public Involvement website:
transportation.ohio.gov/GetInvolved

Office of Statewide Planning and Research website:
transportation.ohio.gov/SPR

Access Ohio website:
access.ohio.gov

STIP website:
transportation.ohio.gov/STIP

MPO contacts found at:
transportation.ohio.gov/MPOContacts

RTPO contacts found at:
transportation.ohio.gov/RTPO

Rural Consultation Process Manual found at:
transportation.ohio.gov/RTPO
Appendices

Appendix A: Definitions

Definitions adapted from Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Title 23 - Highways, §450.104

Consideration: one or more parties take into account the opinion, action, and relevant information from other parties in making a decision or determining a course of action.

Consultation: one or more parties confer with other identified parties in accordance with an established process and, prior to taking action(s), considers the views of the other parties and periodically informs them about action(s) taken.

Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan: the official, statewide, multimodal, transportation plan covering a period of no less than twenty years developed through the statewide transportation planning process.

Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA): the geographic area determined by agreement between the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the area and the Governor, in which the metropolitan transportation planning process is carried out.

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO): the policy board of an organization created and designated to carry out the metropolitan transportation planning process.

Non-Metropolitan Area: a geographic area outside a designated metropolitan planning area. Also referred to as rural area.

Non-Metropolitan Local Officials: elected and appointed officials of general purpose local government in non-metropolitan areas with responsibility for transportation.

Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO): the policy board of an organization created and designated to carry out the transportation planning process for areas outside traditional metropolitan areas, known as non-metropolitan areas or rural areas.

Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP): a statewide prioritized listing/program of transportation projects covering a period of four years that is consistent with the long-range statewide transportation plan, metropolitan transportation plans, and TIPs; required for projects to be eligible for funding under title 23 U.S.C. and title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): a prioritized listing/program of transportation projects covering a period of four years that is developed and formally adopted by an MPO as part of the metropolitan transportation planning process, consistent with the metropolitan transportation plan, and required for projects to be eligible for funding under title 23 U.S.C. and title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53.

Urbanized Area: a geographic area with a population of 50,000 or more, as designated by the Bureau of the Census.
ODOT’s Statewide Planning Program
Public Involvement Process

Appendix B: Federal Regulations

As specified in 23 CFR

Section 450.210 (a), “In carrying out the statewide transportation planning process, including development of the long-range statewide transportation plan and the STIP, the State shall develop and use a documented public involvement process that provides opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points.”

Also, the State at a minimum must:

Section 450.210 (a)(1)(i), “establish early and continuous public involvement opportunities that provide timely information about transportation issues and decision-making processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, providers of freight transportation services, and other interested parties.”

Section 450.210 (a) (2), “The State shall provide for public comment on existing and proposed processes for public involvement in the development of the long-range statewide transportation plan and the STIP. At a minimum, the State shall allow 45 calendar days for public review and written comment before the procedures and any major revisions to existing procedures are adopted. The State shall provide copies of the approved public involvement process documents(s) to the FHWA and the FTA for informational purposes.”

Appendix C: ODOT Structure

ODOT planning and engineering staff are located throughout the state at 12 district offices and a central office. The central office manages statewide and regional planning efforts, and is responsible for preparing the statewide transportation plan and managing the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP). ODOTs central office staff also serve as a liaison between ODOT and many of the state’s planning partners including Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), and other governmental agencies. ODOT district staff work with local officials to develop the projects that would result from the statewide planning process. The ODOT district and central offices engage the public as plans, programs, and projects are implemented.